

Prevention of Salmonella Enteritidis in Shell Eggs During Production;
Reopening of Comment Period
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Comments by Richard Dutton, DVM
Michael Foods Egg Products Company

1. How many pullet growing facilities are there in the United States?

Pullet facilities are more tied to the layer complexes than in the past. There are less contract pullet facilities in existence because of the cost of construction and the cost of producing a pullet. Most pullet facilities are tied to the layers either on a total cost basis or a feed plus cost basis and not a pure contract risk basis. .

The number of pullet facilities are based on the layer complex needs. If a layer cycle is 80 weeks, one pullet facility will grow 3 to 3.5 broods depending on the down time. If the layer farm is a single molt cycle the pullet house will provide 4.5 to 5 broods.

As an industry the available pullet housing tends to be slightly short at any period of time.

What is the range in the number of houses on those facilities?

Our farms range from 6 to 10 houses. Our layer facilities range from 15 to 32.

What percentage of pullet growers are under programs or have practices aimed at preventing SE-monitored chicks from being infected by SE during the period of pullet rearing until placement into layer hen houses?

Mostly depends on the request of the end user of the pullets. The percent of testing is relatively high in our area.

Do State or regional Egg Quality Assurance Programs include provisions to prevent SE-monitored chicks from becoming infected by SE during the period of pullet rearing until placement into layer hen houses?

Most programs either private, state or regional have a pullet requirement which at a minimum is an environmental test before moving to the lay house and at a maximum is a chick paper or hatchery culture test and a pullet farm environmental culture before moving test.

NPIP tested hatcheries are currently on a SE testing program which ensures that SE is reportable. Based on this program which in 15 years of our testing has resulted in only 2 problems and that was early in the program in early 1990's. Current testing of NPIP approved flocks have yielded no problems in over 10 years which is the time the NPIP reports have been negative as well. NPIP tested flocks and hatcheries should eliminate the need for chick paper testing. Further testing should be optional to confirm NPIP results not mandatory as long as the hatchery has a good reporting record and testing protocol.

How effective have the pullet programs (whatever the programs entail – cleaning, testing, etc) been in reducing the prevalence of SE in layer flocks?

Our major experiences when we have had problems have been with rodent problems in the pullet house in 2 instances. Both of those houses were high rise houses and both were not cleaned between broods. Both were contract pullet housing where we were buying the birds. One other positive house was unexplained but occurred several years ago in a single house among 9 other houses.

Effectiveness of the program is tested by culturing prior to moving the birds. Effectiveness of the wash and disinfecting program is a subjective evaluation by the farm manager.

2. During pullet rearing, what programs or industry practices are currently taken to prevent SE-monitored chicks from becoming infected by SE during the period of pullet rearing until placement into the layer houses?

Pullet houses have a built in preventative program since dirty houses result in other problems such as Marek's disease. Washing and /or thorough cleaning reduce the incidence of this virus. The result is a more frequent depopulation and cleaning every 4 months.

Are pullets, or their environment, tested for SE between the time they are procured as chicks and the time they enter the layer houses?

As above, at a minimum the environment is tested before the birds are moved to the lay house at 12 to 14 weeks.

When the tested, approximately how often do the pullets or the pullet environments test positive?

In 10 years we have tested 500 to 600 houses within our farm system and found none positive. We wash houses partially to fully and have a rodent program.

What happens after a positive test?

Birds are vaccinated and/or moved to a breaking premises.

Is vaccination used as a preventive measure, if so when and how?

Vaccination is usually used by degree of need. In some cases where the risk is low and the problem is considered low the birds will be vaccinated with a live vaccine up to 3 times. In high risk cases the birds will be vaccinated with 2 live vaccines early and a killed SE at 12 to 14 weeks.

If the birds are destined for shell egg and they are positive they are switched with other pullet flocks and placed in less risk premises. The testing has to be done at 12 or 13 weeks to allow time to vaccinate and still allow the birds a recovery before moving.

What cleaning and disinfecting practices are common?

The range of practices is quite broad. If the total disease challenge is high the house may be maximally cleaned with water, detergents and disinfectants as well as fogged with another disinfectant. If the general challenges are low such as a single house premises there may be a dry cleaning and minimal water use with a disinfectant fog such as formaldehyde.

The removal of SE will require a major and thorough cleaning program.

Are measures taken to reduce the prevalence of rodents and pests in the pullet rearing houses?

The rodent program is a necessity. In high rise pullet houses manure removal is a necessity as well as this is the residence of most mice.